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THIS VIRTUE CALLED TOLERANCE

Is tolerance a virtue at all?

Tolerance is certainly a word that is thrown at us in the most unexpected ways. In a famous broadcast that brought him basketfuls of mail, a leading quiz champion asked for Christmas the gift of more tolerance.

Is tolerance something we should cultivate or is it something we should root out of our souls?

When any human virtue is praised as much as tolerance is praised, we reach the state of mind of Hamlet when he wondered if the praisers did not protest too much.

Naturally, we cannot start any discussion of tolerance unless we realize why it is so vastly praised.

Since we seem to be in for a barrage of questions, I might as well go on.

Is any person with firm convictions about anything whatsoever capable of being entirely tolerant?

Could you or I conscientiously respect a completely tolerant person? Could we respect the sort of person who never cares what anyone says or does, who thinks all truths and all shades of lies and errors are equally tolerable, or who thinks nothing should be done to check the criminal or hold the beast in control?

Putting it into one final question, "When we moderns use the word tolerance, do we really mean tolerance at all or are we thinking of some other real virtue that has somehow stolen into that capacious and often inaccurate word?"

Tolerance can be Gentleness and The Tolerant can be Intolerant

Doctor A. J. Cronin, a Catholic and a writer of best sellers, wrote his most successful novel, "*The Keys of the Kingdom*," around a priestly hero whose outstanding virtue is supposed to be "tolerance." Of the hero of this book, the writer of the jacket blurb says, "He believed that tolerance was the highest virtue and that humility came next."

I maintain that when Doctor Cronin created Father Chisholm he made him, like Saint Francis of Assisi, wonderfully gentle.

Father Chisholm loved everyone, even the most unattractive, who stretched out a hand for help. He was decent even to the men who stoned him and to the bandit chief who captured him. That was splendid. That was very like Saint Francis of Assisi or Christ the gentle Savior.

I am quite willing to agree that Father Chisholm, the hero of Doctor Cronin's book, is a patient man and a wonderfully gentle one. I think he had a genuine desire to understand what the other man believed and why he believed it. He had all the fine instincts that make a gentleman loath to cram his own convictions, however sacred they may be, or however firmly he may hold them, down the unwilling craw of the other chap. He tried, as do all decent people, to see the good in everyone.

Undoubtedly, in his love of human beings and his vast patience with them, in his unwillingness to beat them into submission or to sit in judgment upon their conduct or their religious beliefs, Father Chisholm does suggest the holy man of poverty. Again, we must refer to the blurb on the jacket. The reader, we are told, is bound to think of Saint Francis of Assisi when he reads about Father Chisholm.

However, could Father Chisholm be tolerant? Could he think all religions were equally good? Could he let that bandit chief destroy his work, his orphans in their battered orphanage, or the nuns who depended upon him to save them?

On the contrary, intolerant Father Chisholm flung the torch that destroyed his enemies. He was not tolerant enough to let the villains live to burn his orphanage, rape the nuns, or hold his beloved little children slaves and prostitutes.

Doctor Cronin himself describes the way the Chinese doctors treat the patients who fall into their hands. Doctor Cronin would be completely intolerant of a witch doctor trying his incantations over the body of Cronin's own sick child. He would indignantly refuse to share his offices with an Indian medicine man who believed he could cure every disease by dancing a devil dance around the patient.

Saint Francis – Patient, Gentle, and Intolerant?

How utterly shocked Saint Francis would have been had anyone called him tolerant?

He clung to what he believed with an almost ferocious tenacity. He wept bitter tears over the sad plight of the Mohammedans. He yearned to pull sinners out of the quicksand of their sins. He longed to win the whole world to what he knew to be the religion that God had given through the voice and example of His Son.

Undoubtedly, Saint Francis of Assisi was the gentlest man since Christ. He was tirelessly patient with the sinful, the stupid, the stubborn, and the tedious. He sat and talked pleadingly with the Moslem rulers who fell captive to his charms. However, he would have shuddered at the suggestion that he should regard Christ and Mohammed as joint rulers on the peak of some tolerant Olympus. He would have protested vehemently if anyone had urged that it did not much matter what a man believed or what sort of road he tried to hew upward to the gateway of God. He would have given his life, not to preserve the right of a man to hold what he himself thought a wrong opinion, but to win a man to what he, Saint Francis, was convinced was the essential truth.

Therefore, Saint Francis of Assisi would have been—and actually was—utterly intolerant of heresy, error, sin, the evil practices that make mankind wretched.

Saint Francis loved the sinner, but he hated the sin. That sentence, old as it is, is the “*ultra quod non datur*” of human conduct. Though he would have given his life to turn the sinner from sinful ways, Saint Francis could not pretend that he thought the ways of the murderer, the seducer, the tyrant, or the thief other than the intolerable crimes they were.

Intolerance or Cruelty?

It might be smart to recall what makes the question of “tolerance” so important before we plunge too deeply into the question or the answer.

Like the rest of civilized men and women who have taken to themselves the pleasant prefix “gentle,” I abhor the cruelty and, if you wish, the intolerance of Hitler, Stalin, the KKK, the Jehovah Witnesses, and the Jew-baiters, who make life intolerable for a large sector of their fellow men.

However, is what these supposedly “intolerant” people are doing really intolerance? Isn’t it rather cruelty . . . or greed . . . or ignorance . . . or a sheer love of making others suffer . . . or jealousy . . . or a blind, animal distaste for those who block their purposes?

Tolerance - Liberalism or Totalitarianism?

Forces bent on destroying all those who disagree with them have swept across the world. Those forces are determined to root up any opinion that blocks their way.

We have lived to see the advanced liberalism of the world swing to the opposite extreme of totalitarianism in government and thought.

There must be one political system, and only one. The people of only one nation are the dominant race. All others are inferiors, destined to be subject and slave. All people must think only those thoughts dictated by a brilliant and unscrupulous propaganda. Minorities have no rights. All the strong freedoms by which we have lived are to be swept away.

The picture is too familiar and immediate to need more than the roughest of broad strokes.

We have seen the fierce persecution of the Jews. We have seen Catholics in Mexico and Russia and France and Germany deprived of their natural rights because of their adherence to what they believed the teachings of God-made-man.

The rights of the individual have been stripped away from him as you might strip an insignia of rank from an officer who betrayed his regiment. National aspirations have been treated as unworthy even of contempt, as ridiculous and fit only to be crushed and suppressed.

We have hated and despised all of that, and have lumped it all under the convenient label of “intolerance.” And those who have hated all of that intolerance were, thus, called tolerant.

Thus, the greatest of crimes became known as intolerance. Those not participating in those crimes or those disagreeing with those intolerant activities became known as tolerant and tolerance became the noblest of the virtues.

Do We Mean It?

Now it is a historic fact that people are always bragging about virtues that they do not have. I am talking not of the liar or the insincere.

Naturally, a murderer would, to protect himself, insist that he was full of the milk of human kindness and madly in love with his fellow man. The banker whose bank is teetering on a financial cliff will swear vehemently that he is completely solvent. The pursuer of innocence does not come in the guise of the howling wolf he is. Instead, he pulls the pelt stolen from the lamb up above his ears and camouflages his fangs by mouthing guileless “daisies.”

These men are frank liars. They simply claim to have virtues that they know they do not have.

I am talking about the people who simply pat themselves on the back for the wrong quality. People who are convinced they have that virtue, when that “virtue” actually turns out to be some quality they never even thought about.

Are You Honest or Are You Just Outspoken?

Take the young people who brag about their honesty.

“Whatever else you may say about us—and perhaps that is plenty—one thing you’ll have to admit,” they brag, “We’re honest.”

What they really should say is, “We’re frank.”

“Frank” is entirely another thing. They probably are not a bit honest. They lie to their parents about where they’ve been. They waste in simply unscrupulous fashion the education that has been given to them. They steal book reports and hand them in as their own. They hand anyone who is simple enough to listen to them the most unblushing “line.” They cheat skillfully in examinations. They build up fabulous alibis to get themselves out of a jam.

After all this dishonesty, about which they may be perfectly frank, they still think they are honest.

It is true, they admit they were tight last evening or not too careful about their personal conduct. They admit that they put one over on the teacher or parents or told some chance acquaintance the most wonderful yarns. They do not see that this admission is merely frankness or candor. It does not have even a slight relationship to honesty. Murderers and highwaymen and bank robbers and kidnappers have been known to be notoriously frank. They have seldom been honest.

Is it Faith or is it Hope?

Good Protestants today are, in many cases, mixed up about the virtues and meanings of faith and hope. They say, “I have faith in Jesus Christ,” which is what they do not have.

They may not believe half the things He taught. Out of all His clear teachings, they may have selected just those that they wish to include in their own private little creed.

What they really have is hope. They sincerely trust that in the end God will save them. They have no faith in hell, yet they hope they won't go there.

They have no faith in Christ's doctrines concerning the Trinity; yet they hope to see God, whatever He may be like, face to face.

They do not follow Christ in His clear teachings on divorce. They hope he will understand their weakness and forgive them.

They do not accept any of the more difficult doctrines. They rely on His goodness and hope He will make everything right in the end.

While they are not quite sure whether they ought to believe Christ God, they hope He will exercise a god-like protection over them and love them with a god-like forgiving love.

Is it Tolerance or is it Patience?

Therefore, when people use the word tolerance today, they are in all likelihood thinking of another virtue entirely. They are thinking of the splendid virtue of patience, which we are inclined to call by the more modern name gentleness.

People do not admire a tolerant man. A question to be answered is, could they admire him—if they understood what is meant by tolerance. Patience is gentleness. People admire a gentle man or, if you prefer, a gentleman. They like a man who is strong enough to be patient. They admire courtesy shown toward those who do not deserve it. They love those humane qualities and virtues that make a man attractive, charming, understanding, and quick to forgive.

Voltaire Speaks

Tolerance today is usually discussed in the light of Voltaire's famous epigram, which is variously quoted. In substance, it always comes to this: "I will fight your opinions with my life, but I will fight to the death for your right to hold them"—which is probably one of the most ridiculous statements ever made.

One can parody it rather easily:

"I will fight your criminal conduct with the best police force, but I will fight for your right to be a criminal."

"I will enforce laws to prevent you from selling opium, but I will see that you have a law that permits you to go on selling that opium."

"I will struggle to prevent your hitting my mother; but if you hit her, I'll say, 'Bully Boy.'"

"I will try to thwart your efforts to betray my country, but I concede your right to be as traitorous as you please."

If Applied. . . .

All one has to do is think for just a second where that principle, if it were put into practice. Here are some examples.

A man has the opinion that he is God. As such, he has the right, he believes, over the life and death of others.

"I will fight against your ridiculous idea, but I'll fight for your right to hold and practice your ridiculous idea."

This fellow believes that he will increase the world's supply of money by manufacturing counterfeit money in his basement. "I'll fight to keep you from counterfeiting money, but I'll stop any FBI personnel who try to smash your press."

A chap thinks Robin Hood was a wonderful character, and that he himself, as Robin Hood's successor, has a right to be a local or international gangster.

"I will fight to keep you from following your idea, but I will fight equally hard for your right to think you are Robin Hood and your right to hold up travelers on the highways or the high seas."

A doctor thinks the world would be improved if the practice of medicine were limited to handing out effective poisons to those who are annoyingly sick.

"I'll tell you to your face that you are an enemy of society, but I'll denounce the American Medical Association if it tries to have your license revoked."

Voltaire the Intolerant

We could go on endlessly with this Voltaire nonsense. I have often thought that the constantly insincere Voltaire merely said this to throw the authorities

of his day off the scent. He wanted to say whatever he wished to say. Therefore, he insincerely gave that right to others. He shamed his contemporaries into tolerating him by saying, “Don’t you see? I’d tolerate you under the same circumstances.” In reality, he was bitterly intolerant.

His one slogan, motto, and platform for the Catholic Church was, “Destroy the infamous thing!” One could hardly call that high tolerance.

He dynamited the educational systems of which he did not approve.

He lashed out in the merciless satire at any person or any institution that he happened to find intolerable.

He was intolerant of the lazy nobles and of the churchmen he disliked. He fought fiercely with Frederick of Prussia and was utterly without tolerance for royalty’s sound opinions or nonsense.

He was as intolerant as is that modern “liberal,” Bernard Shaw, who quite calmly consigns to the gas chamber any enemies of society he wishes to brand with the title “enemy.” Shaw rages at doctors who practice vivisection and at little girls who sit down to eat a lamb chop. Shaw regards charity workers as frauds worthy only of contempt.

Indeed, Shaw finds it difficult to bear up under the burden of living with the “so-called human race.”

Voltaire and Liberals

Going back to Voltaire once more, we notice he boasted that he was tolerant of “opinions”—and never really was. Not even for a moment.

Therefore, the modern liberal is a man who affects to tolerate any and all opinions. He struggles to keep an open mind. He pretends to exclude no possibility. He claims he is big enough to welcome all shades of opinion. Even when he fights an opinion, he feels called upon to respect it.

TOLERANT - THE WORD ITSELF

That phrase “bear up” brings us to a brief analysis of the word tolerance. Dictionary definitions will not do precisely. They are too tintured with common usage. This careless usage is precisely what I regard as confusing.

Tolerance is a word that roots originally in the Latin word “*fero*,” which has “*tuli*” for its past tense, which means I carried, I bore, I sustained. Therefore, a tolerant person is one who bears, carries, or sustains something laid upon him by his fellow men.

A tolerant man *in that sense* will “bear fools willingly.” He does not slap the stupid in the face or lash out at the bore. He tries to bear the difficulties placed on his human shoulders by the sins of other men and women. He endures patiently; and since the word patient comes from the Latin word “*patior*,” which means to endure, the fact that he endures makes him patient, and the fact that he is patient makes him endure.

Tolerance has Limits

However, there are a great many limits beyond which no man is expected to endure. We are not supposed to endure crime. We pay a police department to see that we don’t have to endure this. We do not have to bear the weight of a tyrannous conqueror. We build our Army and Navy as safeguards against that possibility.

We do not have to be patient with the murderer who whets his stiletto or loads his automatic under our window. We are not required to be tolerant with the man whose avowed purpose is the seduction of our sister. We may lose our patience to the extent of defending our mother. We are not obliged in all gentleness to stand by while villains plot the downfall of our country. We do not have to bend our heads meekly when the thief snatches our purse from our back pocket.

“I’m a patient man, but I can be pushed too far.”

That famous line makes us instinctively nod our heads. The most patient man, the most tolerant man, the man willing to bear up under insults and personal abuse, in the end will come to the fraying-out of his patience.

Tolerance includes Gentle Understanding

Oh, yes. The tolerant man really tries to understand his fellow men. He tries to make all possible allowances for them. He does not damn the criminal unheard or regard all aggressors as villains worthy of the hangman's noose.

In his desire to understand what has made men as they are, he looks into their backgrounds. He works to discover if there might be some method by which they can be saved from themselves. Therefore, behind the fallen woman he sees the villain who tempted her to sin or the squalid home from which she fled in youthful repugnance. He can almost see the petty thief emerging from the slum in which he was born. He tries to find out what twist made the murderer turn to cruelty. He weighs the temptations that the other person may have suffered and thanks God that he himself was not so sorely tempted.

In trying to understand these elements, he comes to a point where he himself condemns no one. He leaves that for God and the lawful authorities. He himself knows only pity and a somewhat deliberately blind acceptance of the best that is in everyone.

For Example. . . .

Even in public enemies, the tolerant man makes an effort to see what led them to their courses.

He reads Mrs. Sanger's account of her own unpleasant childhood home and the wretched life of her mother, and he understands why she strikes out blindly at motherhood.

He hears "Scarface" Al Capone justify himself on the plea that as a public benefactor he is merely trying to supply drink for the thirsting Americans of prohibition days.

He reads Will Durant's autobiography and finds out that that apostate never let himself learn his Catholic faith, which he left without knowing and denied before he had mastered.

He sees the twisted training of Oscar Wilde's youth, so he is not surprised that that young man went the sad, sinful way that was his.

Larger Cases

Even on a larger scale, the tolerant man tries to understand and be sympathetic.

He remembers the mistreatment and abuse heaped upon the Jewish people by kings who called themselves Christian and peoples who were supposed to be Catholic.

He thinks of the wrongs of the poor when he measures the excesses of a strike. He even tries to understand the terrible temptations of the rich to account (possibly) for their broken marriages, smashed homes, and frequent sinister selfishness.

This is almost similar to our saying that the man of goodness and patience tries to find the virtuous side in everyone. He looks for hidden goodness. He scrapes through layers of evil to find the one vein of gold.

He loves them because they are the sons and daughters of God, however far they may be from God and astray in evil. Moreover, it is impossible to be harsh or cruel with those we love.

The Gentle, Patient, Tolerant Way

Therefore, the gentle, patient man—the tolerant man, if you wish—is marked by certain happy courses. For instance, he never forces his opinion on anyone.

He leads his own life of conviction, according to the principles he knows to be true. Loving and prizing his own beliefs, he is more than willing to share

them with others. He would feel it selfish and mean to keep them to himself. However, he does not try to elbow his way into the confidence of others. He does not try to force open their minds to thrust in his truth.

If he sees his fellow men in any kind of danger, he is not likely to be tolerant. He does not argue, “Evidently that fellow wants to walk off that cliff, even though the drop is a thousand feet. I’d better not interfere.”

Instead, he cries out in an effort to save the man. He may even grasp the man’s arm and try to draw him back to safety. He would think the man utterly mad if after this rescue he turned and snarled, “A tolerant man would mind his own business. I like walking off cliffs. I think it’s a perfect way to get a change of scene.”

If the gentle, patient, tolerant man notices that a friend has picked up a glass of poison and is about to toss it off, he does not say, “I wonder whether I would be intruding if I spoke up.”

He speaks up—sharply and peremptorily. “That’s poison,” he cries. “Don’t drink it.”

If the man answers, “So what? I enjoy an arsenic highball before my dinner,” he may yet try to stop him—by force.

He does not beat his breast and cry in his secret soul, “Why didn’t you let him alone, you intolerant fellow?”

So, too, if he sees his friend embracing some belief that he knows to be vicious or a course of life that he is sure will do him enormous harm, he is more than likely to speak up. He will not, of course, take the fellow by the throat and try to choke him into a realization of his mistake. However, he will not consider himself a bigot or an intolerant trespasser if he says, “I think you’re making a great mistake. May I tell you why?”

The tolerant man knows that the mind cannot be forced. Yet, he also knows that the mind can be persuaded.

He realizes the utter futility of backing a fellow into a corner and saying, “Either you accept baptism, or I will fill you full of lead.”

Yet, convinced as he is of the persuasive power of truth, he feels safe in saying, “May I present my case for your consideration? I think you would see the beauty of baptism if you realized that through it you become god-like, sharing divine powers and privileges.”

He knows that you cannot teach by cracking a whip over the heads of students or ramming arguments down reluctant throats. Therefore, he entirely rejects force as a means to win converts. However, he knows the compelling power of a life dominated by a beautiful faith. He knows that people who deny the truth most frequently have never really seen it. Therefore, he tries to live persuasively. He takes every opportunity to present the shining thing he regards as the truth. In all this, he is gentle rather than tolerant.

... But Not Gentle when Facing Evil

He does not feel obliged to tolerate the criminal even though he understands him. He does not think, out of sheer pity for their bad upbringing, that murderers should be allowed to roam the streets with guns in their hands. He thinks that police should be sent to catch thieves. He warns his sisters how to deal with the lustful men who may pursue them.

Even the gentlest is roused to complete intolerance of evil people indulging in evil practices.

The Gentle Christ

In that, they are all only like the gentle Christ. Certainly, no man ever loved his fellowmen more than the God-man did. No man was ever so consistently patient and understanding. He spoke the parable of the prodigal son and then played the role of Father to the returning Magdalen and the repentant Peter. He spoke of the lost sheep and then Himself was the Good Shepherd.

Yet, He struck out at evil men with a fierce intolerance. He simply could not bear their conduct any longer. When, after His warning, He found, them

still polluting the house of His Father with their commerce, sharp practice, and short-changing of the visitors, He drove them out with a little whip that cut through the air and found frightened shoulders.

When the Pharisees persisted in their hypocrisy, He spoke of them in words that were without any trace of tolerance. He called them, “Whited sepulchers,” using the most stinging insult upon which He could lay His tongue (for graves were horrible things to the Jews, places where only lepers and other outcasts could be allowed to stay). And these smooth, lying leaders of the people—whom Christ stigmatized as graves—were quite like graves—outside shining with fresh whitewash, inside filthy, with the rottenness of dead men’s bones.

Christ had a most intolerant figure of speech for the men who betrayed the innocence of youth. It would be better, He cried out, if a heavy millstone were hung about their necks and they be tossed into the sea than they should be allowed to corrupt the sinless children.

Not a Bit Tolerant

Therefore, while a gentle man, like the gentle Christ, may be patient with sinners and slow to resist the criminal that strikes at his own peace of life, he is not likely to be tolerant of the criminal who endangers the happiness and safety and innocence of others.

He does not bear patiently the murderer, the panderer, or the seducer. He is not likely to be gentle with the seller of rotten literature to little children. He does not ask the State to repeal the laws that make the adulterer of food likely to face a prison sentence. He does not believe that the poisoner of springs should be allowed to roam at large with vials of lethal germs in hand.

He would be amazed if anyone suggested that he be patient with a traitor in his country, a traitor who was waiting to blow up the nation’s bridges and kidnap its government officials. He is opposed to witch-hunting and silly political scares. He is not at all inclined to be tolerant with fifth-columnists,* whatever their form.

* A secret subversive group that works against a country or organization from the inside.

Who is Tolerant?

It is amazing how little tolerance we expect from sincere men.

A Doctor?

Consider the earnest, devoted doctor who really loves his profession for the good he believes it can do for humanity. Into his district moves a filthy quack . . . or an abortionist . . . or a fake from a “diploma mill” who preys on the innocent and inoculates them with the diseases he wishes to treat.

You and I would be shocked if the doctor showed tolerance towards men of this type.

Indeed, sincere doctors grow indignant with anyone who gets in the way of human healing—as do men and women who depend upon doctors for their health.

I was in Hollywood shortly after the death of a famous actress. How far the story was true, I cannot vouch; but the studio officials told me that the famous screen actress’s mother was a Christian Scientist, who refused to allow the doctors to treat her daughter until it was too late. I found little tolerance or sympathy on the part of those who had been attached to the actress for what they considered unnecessary, cruel, and inhuman.

A Lawyer?

Lawyers are not likely to be tolerant of shysters who trail ambulances and trick widows and orphans out of their inheritance. The Bar Association is not a particularly tolerant organization.

A Businessman?

Honest businessmen are not likely to be tolerant of the merchants who sell rotten goods or charge unfair prices. The Better Business Bureau and kindred associations are paid to be hard on the wolves of the business world.

A Scientist?

Certainly, the scientist is not tolerant. Where the known facts of science are concerned, he is hopelessly intolerant.

If to the great astronomer comes the youngster out of high school with this statement, “Listen, Mister Astronomer, you’re crazy if you think the earth moves around the sun, for I saw the sun rise and set just yesterday.”

The astronomer’s conduct is entirely predictable. He will pat the youngster on the head and say, “I know it’s a little hard for a young fellow to understand. But some day you’ll grasp the reason why the sun is the center of our solar system and the earth circles around it.”

By no widest stretch of fancy can we imagine his saying, “Well now, young man, you’ve got something there. Of course, there are those of us who believe that the earth moves around the sun, but I should not want to shut out your opinion that the sun moves round the earth. You may be right. I may be right. Let’s both of us keep our own opinions.”

No, he would not say that—if he wanted, that is, to ensure the science was correct, that he would continue to be respected in his field, and if he wanted to stay out of the asylum.

A Professor?

We can imagine a professor of chemistry approached by a young fellow dressed like a mediaeval alchemist. The strange newcomer who looks like an old-timer says, “I want to teach your class tomorrow, professor. I want to explain that there are only four elements—earth, air, fire, and water.”

The chemist looks at him in amazement and replies, “Where in the world did you learn that?”

“Out of a chemistry book written in the year 1243,” says the youth.

“Well,” muses the modern professor, “there may be something to what you say. Suppose you take over tomorrow. I have taught the modern table of

elements, of course. However, if you think there are only four, maybe you are correct. At any rate, I think my students should get both sides of the question, and then they can leave their minds open.”

Would he say that? What do you think? He might pity the young fellow or decide that he had just come from a costume ball or escaped from an institution enclosed in high walls. He certainly would not have him kept captive until he admitted there were more than four elements. He would not throttle him and yell, “Say more! Say more!”

We should not, however, ask or expect from him tolerance of what he knows to be an entirely antiquated false idea.

Is anyone tolerant in that sense? All this is so clear that one wonders how tolerance can be praised so highly when on so many occasions it would be no virtue at all but a simple crime against humanity. **It is one thing to be gentle and kind to even the worst criminal. It is quite another to stand aside and tolerantly let him pursue his villainous way.** Who would even dare suggest that such is a noble course?

No Tolerance Here

The plain fact is that we cannot be tolerant where untruth is involved. If we know a thing is true, we cannot say, “I know that is true, but it’s perfectly all right to have you think that it isn’t true.”

Such conduct would make us simply ridiculous. We know that George Washington did live. If anyone proposed a theory that he did not live, we might be amused, tolerant in the sense that we would listen to him spin his nebulous arguments. However, in the end we would be just where we were before he proposed his theory—and utterly intolerant of his nonsensical idea.

If Ibsen says (and he did say it) that on the moon perhaps two and two make five, we don’t say, tolerantly, “Well maybe on the moon all men are lunatics, and two and two do make five.” We intolerantly brush aside his moonshine and go on holding what we know to be true.

We may be tolerant, if you wish, with the person who talks this nonsense. We do not strike him across the face. We do not chain him up and beat him every day until he confesses he is wrong and we are right. We do not call him names and lay rough hands on him. We are gentle and patient even with the fool or the perverse. We are not, however, even slightly tolerant of his crack-brained ideas.

When Are We Tolerant?

If we are tolerant about the other fellow's opinions in the sense that we say, "Well, you have as much right to your opinion as I have," a number of things may be surmised about us. A few include:

- Perhaps we regard these opinions as not worth bothering about;
- We think our own contrary opinions not worth defending;
- We may realize that what he holds has no relationship to life anyhow, and is too trifling to have any effect on the course of the world; or
- We simply show that we don't believe that the things we hold are really true.

Not Important

If a man comes to me and says, "After all these years I finally have proof that the moon is made of green cheese," I am not likely to burst into a furious argument. I should probably greet this amazing return to the nursery with a shrug of my shoulders. If he wants to believe that the moon is made of green cheese—fine with me. He can even think he is a mouse bent on nibbling the moon provided he does not in his role of mouse start to gnaw me or my belongings. The whole thing is too insignificant for me to worry about.

Or, if a man says positively, "Mothers-in-law are not things to fume at; they are merely funny." As it happens, I do not have a mother-in-law and, in the

course of nature or grace, shall not ever have one. There he can believe whatever he wishes. I am completely tolerant on the subject. So, if this fellow thinks mothers-in-law are amusing, it is of utter unimportance to me.

Not Worth Defending

Sometimes we are not sufficiently interested in our own opinions to bother to defend them and, by so doing, to exclude all others.

Sometime ago I read “Oliver Wiswell.” Up to that time, I had always regarded Benedict Arnold as a traitor and a scamp; the book insisted that he was a hero and a gentleman whose “treason” was motivated by the highest love of country. Well, as far as I am concerned, Benedict Arnold and the whole question of his treason are equally dead. I was a little annoyed at what I believed to be a false attitude. However, I was not concerned enough with my own opinion either to denounce the author or to rush to authentic sources to find out which of us was right. Let Benedict Arnold and his treason lie in their graves—unhonored. Neither was of any real concern to me.

I happen to think that blue is the most charming of colors. If I came upon someone who believed that yellow was the choice of all true artists, I should refuse to be ruffled, to get into an argument, or to show any signs of intolerance. I like blue. You like yellow or purple or battleship grey.

Who cares?

A musician meets me. “What composer do you regard as the greatest?” he demands.

“I don’t know who is the greatest,” I answer, “but I have always enjoyed Tchaikovsky most.”

“You fool,” he cries; “Beethoven is far and away the master.”

Now I do not like to be called a fool; but if that chap thinks for a minute he is going to involve me in any argument about dead and gone musicians, he has a number of guesses left. I like Tchaikovsky. He prefers Beethoven. Let it rest

right there. In addition, if he insists that I say Beethoven is the greatest, just to please him I may say “Beethoven is the greatest.” The issue is trifling, and what I think makes no difference one way or another.

No Effect on Life

There is also the possibility that I may think the opinions involved have no real reference to life itself. Thought is cheap, I argue. What difference does it make what a man believes? It has no reference to what he does.

(That was the “liberal” attitude that for a century pretended to dominate our civilization.)

As a matter of fact, it makes all the difference in the world what a man thinks. If an idiot thinks of himself as a lampshade, he is going to go about trying to find a lamp to sit on. If a man is persuaded that he is a bird, he will try to take off. If a man believes he is a soulless animal, why shouldn’t he, in all logic, begin to behave like a beast?

Ever since Voltaire laid down his utterly impractical principle of tolerance, the “liberals” of the world have struggled to be hospitable to every idea.

Too Hospitable

However, the liberals of the world took that comprehensive attitude chiefly toward religious, philosophical, economic, and political principles.

For example: Does God exist? Is there any revealed religion? Have you a soul? Is there any difference between men and animals? Are men really free? Are there any principles of right and wrong to govern men in the making of money? Are nations bound by laws as individuals are? For that matter, are individuals themselves bound by laws?

The questions could go on indefinitely. The answers were limitless in number.

What difference did it all make? None of the answers, the liberal held, was important, anyhow.

One's own opinion, though pleasant enough, was not really worth defending. Oh, in science one could be intolerant. In mathematics, one could be inflexible. What difference did it make whether or not God existed? Who cared whether we had a soul? What were the odds if a man broke the Ten Commandments, and the big powers ran all over the world, gobbling up the smaller nations and creating vast empires?

About all these things, let us be tolerant. Let us allow anyone to hold any opinion that he wants to hold. It does not make any difference anyway.

Consequences of Liberalism

The women said, "I don't believe there is any such thing as impurity."

The liberals said, "What does it matter?" The women began to live as if impurity did not matter.

Men said, "I don't believe there are such things as right and wrong."

The liberals said, "Who can be sure?"

So, we had the ruthless conquerors of imperial empires, the money barons who played pirate on Wall Street, the gangsters who became briefly our national heroes, and the rebels who spit in the face of God.

Bigger Consequences of Liberalism

Then, all of a sudden, the liberal, the man who believed that you must be utterly tolerant about what the other fellow believes, got the jolt of the century. He got Hitler and Stalin and the Brown Shirts and the Black Shirts. **And tolerance blew up like a bombed glass factory.**

Even up to the point of their real awakening, these liberals had not been practicing the tolerance they claimed as their great virtue. They maintained that after all, there might be a variety of political theories and we should be open-minded toward all of them. Therefore, they were extremely open-

minded toward all every form except Fascism. Toward Fascists their liberalism failed. They could not be tolerant. They hated them and wanted them wiped from the earth.

Liberals were tolerant toward all religions—provided, of course, that the religion was not Catholic. They dabbled in the Eastern cults and embraced in their affection the thousand forms of Protestantism; but they excluded from their tolerance the Catholic faith and practice.

Fatal Results

Then came the real awakening. “*Time Magazine*” wrote about it under Literature and Books in its book-review section. It was entitled, “This Return of the Liberals.” The liberals suddenly realized that Hitler and Stalin were simply inevitable outgrowths of the “tolerance” that they, the liberals, had extended to more or less all forms of thinking.

For as a man thinks, so he is. Only the liberals were a little late in discovering the obvious. Hitler and Stalin had been doing a lot of thinking. They thought that war was a glorious thing, so they set themselves to wage it. They thought that men were just animals, so they treated men with colossal contempt. They wrote a new philosophy of the State that was as old as paganism itself. Their philosophy was that the State was supreme and men and women had no rights except those that the State gave them. Therefore, they treated their subjects as slaves who had no right to voice, to thought, to meeting, or to religion. They abolished God with a gesture, so there was no force they needed to fear. They talked of the supremacy of one race or of one class, and they followed that talk with an effort to make that German race or that proletarian class supreme over all others.

They thought that men were animals, so they behaved like brutes. They wondered if men had any freedom; and if man had no freedom, how could Hitler be blamed for plunging three continents into a bath of blood, or Stalin for binding his dependents with chains? They held that there was no heaven for which to hope. Therefore, logically they determined to get right here and now as large a slice of earth as they could possibly grab.

Liberalism Falls

Liberalism fell with a dismal thud.

The liberals, who had been so tolerant of everything, became fiercely intolerant of ideas, men, political systems, and whole nations. They denounced with fury the slavery of Germany and the slavery of Russia. They had no tolerance for that sort of thing. They were all for getting Hitler with bloodhounds or trench mortars or bombing planes or assassins' knives. They had no tolerance for him. They regarded Fascists, whatever the shade of the shirt, as the curse of the earth. They could not include in their tolerance either the Italians or the Germans. They had cried, not five years ago, that nothing was worth fighting for; now they were all for bombers for Britain and our own Navy's ranging the seas to exterminate the forces of the intolerable enemy.

All of this just pointed to their belated grip on the old principle, "As a man thinks, so he is."

They quickly realized that if you are tolerant of a man's principles you cannot be surprised at his living according to what he believes.

Real Virtues Remain

Kindness and gentleness of heart stood the test even of tyrants and war. Those who loved their fellow men still loved them. Christians prayed even for Hitler and Stalin.

Tolerance (that had insisted it did not make any difference what a man believed, held, or thought) found itself right in the center of a blitzkrieg, bombed out of its ivory tower, and blasted out of its cloistered study.

Loving Yet Intolerant

As a matter of fact, one can love one's fellow men and still be honestly intolerant of their ideas that are destructive or evil.

Mohammedism

Saint Francis loved the Mohammedans. He traveled the long, painful, dangerous journey to see if he could possibly win them to Christ. However, where their religious ideas were concerned, he was fiercely intolerant. He hated a religion that denied that women had souls. He thought it horrible that people should—in what were called the houses of God—be taught to hate all infidels and to gain heaven by spilling the blood of those infidels. He loathed the Mohammedan's sensuous heaven, which set as the ideal of man's aspirations lustful pleasure and the abuse of women. He could not bear to think that the sweet Christ had been anywhere supplanted by the blood-hungry, much-married Mohammed.

Hinduism

The missionaries who went into India loved the Hindus with a deep affection. They gave their lives for these wandering children of God. Yet, they could not conceivably be tolerant of the Hindu religion. They saw all around them the horrible caste system. Men were born pariahs, outcasts, and so they must remain. Even the best Hindu could do nothing about it, for that caste system was part of the religious belief. People were born into this outcast state because of sins they had committed in a former life. This was their punishment for unrepented sins; and it was a crime against the Hindu religion to make less horrible the lot of these outcasts.

Nor could the missionaries tolerate child marriage or the burning of widows on the pyres of their husbands. It was quite all right to demand sweet, unselfish service to Hindus; it was ridiculous to ask Christians to be tolerant towards religious ideas that led inevitably to the squalor and misery of India.

Buddhism

No missionary who has ever been in China can help loving the Chinese. But that love does not require him to be tolerant toward Buddhism. Buddhism in its original form destroyed all concept of God. That left man an orphaned bit

of flotsam tossed on a purposeless sea of life. Realizing the horrible loneliness of such a religion, Buddhism swung to the far extreme and gave its worshippers millions of tiny gods, which was silly.

Could Christians be expected to be tolerant toward the filth and squalor of Tibet, where prayers are said not with the heart but with the whirl of a wheel? Could they be tolerant towards the opinion that girl babies are fit only to be thrown out for the slave dealers or the masters of prostitutes to retrieve from death? Could they be tolerant toward a philosophy that looked always back to the past and never toward the future?

What Then?

What is the consequence of all we have been saying here?

The virtue that we should all love and practice from our hearts is a vast patience for all the sons and daughters of God.

Call this gentleness, if you will, or call it human pity, or understanding. It is the sign of a great soul. It is the one basis on which civilization can be built. It is a gloriously constructive expression of the great Christ-like command to love one's neighbor as oneself.

However, unrestricted tolerance is quite another thing. One cannot be tolerant towards crime.

One cannot safely bear the activities of the criminal, no matter what form those activities take. When there is a question of truth versus error, we cannot even pretend to be tolerant.

From Tolerance to Confusion

Thus, tolerance may simply be a sign of mental weakness and uncertainty. Protestantism has been most intolerant toward the Catholic Church, simply because for generations the leaders of Protestantism have taught their followers a mass of scandalous lies about the teaching of the Church. All the time these Protestants have not even been permitted to know what the Church

really does teach. Protestants have not hated the Catholic Church; they have hated the caricature of the Catholic Church that has been built up to excite them to distaste and distrust and deep enmity.

Toward the various sects within the vast hodge-podge that is Protestantism however, Protestants have come to be ridiculously tolerant. They are not sure of their own religion. They have seen and heard so many explanations of even simple texts that none of these explanations seems important. They have reached a point, not of tolerance, but of indifference. It does not much matter which of Christ's teachings you accept or deny. One, two, three, five, or seven sacraments? What difference does it make?

Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Congregationalist? After all, one can pass from one group to the other with scarcely the ruffling of the part in one's hair. Which of all the claimants to the name Protestant has the truth? Who can be sure? Let us be widely tolerant.

God's Truth

If God revealed one immutable truth, He established one Church and not a bedlam of Churches. If God traced one sure road to His eternal city and provided along that road all the aids necessary for a safe journey and a happy arrival . . .

How can a person be tolerant towards any other truth or church or path any more than an astronomer can believe that beside the fact that the earth moves around the sun there is perhaps the fact that the sun daily travels around the earth and the moon does a grand right-and-left with the other planets?

Gentleness and Love

In the heart of each of us, there must be an abounding gentleness and love of our fellow men. We can never for a moment allow ourselves to be tempted by the easy way of force. It seems too simple a gesture to hold a gun at an opponent's temple and say, "My truth or your life." We must remember that

gentleness is the strongest force in the entire world and that the patient lover of mankind is the one who in the end finds the lost sheep and brings him back to the Good Shepherd.

However, now we know anew that tolerance of untruth is not expected or possible. We cannot be asked to believe that two and two make seven. We cannot be asked to admit the possibility of man being either an animal or a soul without a body or an accident in a purposeless cosmos. We cannot be tolerant when people say that Christ was so poor an organizer that the one Church He thought He was building turned out to be a discordant babel of a thousand Churches. We cannot be acquiescent when Mohammed and Confucius and Buddha and the Savior of the world are lumped together in one antique shop of religious dust and cobweb.

Right and Truth Prevail

Truth is truth. One cannot be tolerant of untruth.

Right is right. One cannot bear willingly the clamors and claims of evil.
Christ is the Light of the World. One cannot be asked to walk in darkness.

We can be gentle and kind and loving and merciful to all. However, where God's truth and man's rights and dignities are concerned, we cannot be asked to be tolerant. Such tolerance is treason to God and to man.

We can have no part in it.



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